



### The rabbitry:

## Overcoming the “cute factor”

By DAVE BUTERBAUGH

Many of my friends, relatives, and even occasional fellow breeders have expressed their disbelief at the fact that I can “kill one of those adorable little fuzzies” when I mention that some of our rabbits are raised specifically to be used for meat. Although some have been turned by a dinner invitation with a rabbit as the guest of honor, some have refused, and can’t overcome what I have called the “Cute Factor.”

As a breeder of rabbits, I get to see them at their best and worst. The rabbit that comes up to the front of the cage every time you walk by and begs for attention (or sunflower seeds) is one that even for the hardest of hearts will find to be difficult to harvest. Some will never be able to harvest a brood favorite, even once its useful life is past. Other animals that are less than friendly or even aggressive are almost easy even for those who are the more softhearted. I’ve said more than once, all it takes is one rabbit hanging from your arm by its teeth while you’re trying to feed it, you’ll find butchering “that adorable little fuzzy” not so difficult at all!

So how do those who have difficulty “killing Thumper,” force

themselves to do so with minimal guilt? The answers are fairly simple, but not necessarily easy without some personal discipline. But hey! We’re homesteaders, we’re good at self-discipline!

1. Keep reminding yourself, your partner and particularly any youngsters, that these are “cattle.” They are not pets to be held and fondled. They get fed, watered, their cages cleaned and put back to be left alone. They have each other and their mothers for company, they don’t need you. Leave them alone.

2. I would advise those who have a tendency for attachment to their animals to have a pet rabbit, even if it is kept outside in a cage with the other rabbits. When you need to cuddle with a rabbit, pull him out.



Keep just one or two animals as designated pets, if you must.

Incidentally, it is usually best to have a male as a pet as long as you handle him often. Females can be “temperamental” at times due to hormones.

3. Start out your rabbit herd with rabbits that are not the cutest breeds. This seems like a simplistic answer, but it is often ignored. Get a meat breed like the New Zealand or California. They are not a “cute” rabbit when they reach 10 week harvesting maturity. They are bred specifically to raise for meat, and have a very fast growing rate with minimal cost for feed (for pellet feed, cost for these breeds is about two cents a day per rabbit after a five-week weaning period). There is little that brings out the cute in them past seven or eight weeks, and just looking at them will remind you that they are for meat.

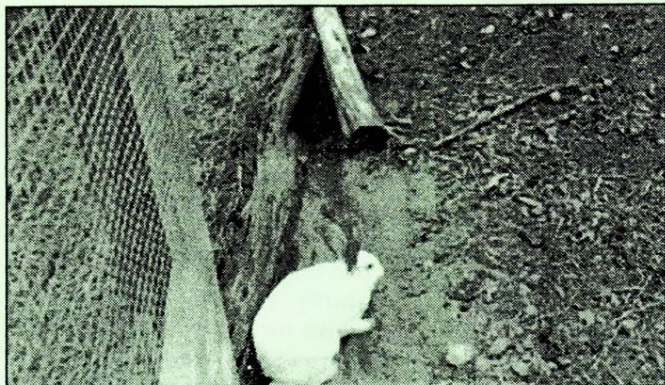
4. For those who want all the benefits of this wonderful meat but can’t bring themselves to actually kill and butcher them, there is always the option of the local butcher. For someone who will be returning regularly to a local butcher, special prices under \$2 can normally be worked out with the professional if you’re willing to let him or her have the pelts to sell. That still leaves you with a five-pound rabbit yielding about 2.5 pounds of usable meat that costs about \$3-\$4. That’s a bargain in anyone’s book.

Be creative! My dad used to butcher his rabbits himself unless he knew I was coming home on leave from the Army. Then he’d save several weeks to a month’s worth of butchering for me when I got home! You may even have a local hunter who has no problem processing them for no more than a “cut” of the meat afterward.

Rabbit meat is the best of all worlds when it comes to the small or even large homestead. The meat is flavorful, filling, and the best of all commercially produced meats for you. Rabbits can be a great little pet, but with proper protection of your feelings and those of your family, they can also be a great addition to your dinner table.

*Dave Buterbaugh, Hippity Hop Rabbitry, New Zealand Whites, Thriantas and French Angoras.*





Raising rabbits in colonies works well for some people, but it does have its drawbacks, such as the burrow under the log.

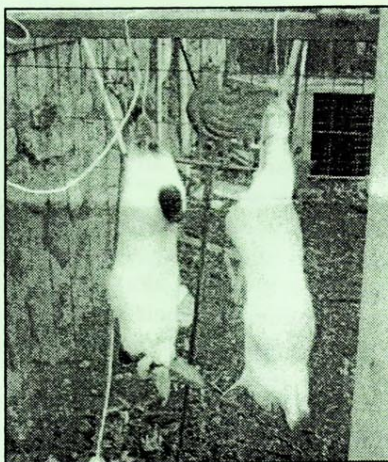
### The rabbitry:

## **Raise rabbits for meat** ***They're quieter than chickens***

BY LAURA LITTLE  
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Last summer I bought a breeding pair of California rabbits from a local farm. I intended to hutch raise them, this being the normal course of action, but my husband had other ideas. The result has been a modified colony situation. The rabbits live in a pen where the hutch serves as their feeding station. They have dug a hole, which has an entrance and an exit, and this is where all the kits have been born. They don't get trotted out until they are about a month old. At this point they are caught and sexed. Males go over the fence into the Buck Bunny pen, which is identical to the Female Bunny pen with the exception of a burrow. The males seem to live happily together, but this bears watching as I have heard that they will fight over females. But since the females are in a different pen, I am hopeful that this will not occur.

The main difficulty with a colony is the burrow. Rabbits not wanting to be caught simply run down the hole. If you want exercise, come visit me at butchering time. It takes about 15 minutes to catch a rabbit at my house. By the time you've been through the



chase, you are good and ready to have at it with no regrets.

We feed the rabbits Nutrena Naturewise rabbit pellets, fresh water twice a day, occasional treats of carrot or apple. They get straw under the hutches and in several places around the pen for eating or lining a nest, or whatever they want. We use an old chicken feeder to hold the food, and a gallon chicken waterer.

They have their own assigned area for defecation, and this just needs to be shoveled up and composted.

We have used welded wire fencing for the pen, then 4' h x 1" gauge chicken wire around the bottom of the fence to keep the little ones in. We have not had any rabbits burrow out. They are happy in their pen and if one somehow gets out, maybe under our feet when we enter or exit, they will sit by the gate and wait to be let back in.

When it came time to butcher, I followed an excellent tutorial from Polyface Farms apprentices. I am saving my skins in the freezer until I get enough to work with. At that point I am going to try to preserve them and make a lining for a blanket.

That's how we do thing here at Good Enough Farm. Anyone with questions can visit my blog at <http://goodenoughfarm.blogspot.com>, or email me at [little.laura1@google.com](mailto:little.laura1@google.com).

*Left: Hanging the rabbits at a comfortable height makes skinning easier.*

*Below: Cut-up rabbit meat and pelt.*

